**THE ABCS OF RTI**

**RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION**

**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL READING**

Many schools are beginning to use Response to Intervention (RTI) in

the classroom, and educators have found that it has made a diff erence

for many students. Th e purpose of RTI is to identify those children who

are struggling in school and to ensure that each of those children receive

just the right instruction or intervention to be successful. Th is pamphlet

has been prepared to help you understand RTI. It can help you to ask the

right questions about RTI and to understand how this approach is being

used with your child.

Screening (testing) all children in a school helps identify students who

may need extra help. Teachers choose specifi c materials or methods

(the instruction or intervention) to use with children needing this extra

help. Th en, teachers and staff carefully keep track of whether or not the

children are doing better and making progress when these materials

and methods are used. (Keeping track of progress is called progress

monitoring.)

Listed on the following page are the important RTI characteristics, or

practices, and the page number where more information is located.

Th roughout this booklet, you also will fi nd sections called “A Brief Visit

to Feynman Elementary School” that will give you some examples of

what RTI practices might look like in the classroom. Also included are

questions you might ask your child’s school. Th ese questions are also at

the end of the pamphlet, with space added so you can write answers and

add your own questions.

If your child is struggling in school, it is important that you understand

your rights as a parent. See page 15 for additional information

(Important Information for Parents) about special education and how

RTI fi ts with the special education process.

Please note that the RTI practices listed on the next page relate to

practices regardless of subject area. For example, RTI can be used with

math instruction. Th e detailed information following the “RTI Practices”

section specifi cally relates to elementary school reading

**RTI PRACTICES - TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**School-wide Screening Page 2**

The school gives all students a screening test – usually three times

each year – so that teachers and staff will know which students

need extra help with academic work or behavior.

**Progress Monitoring Page 4**

For students needing extra help, school staff members frequently

(for example, at least once every week) check the progress of

each child to see what changes, if any, need to be made in the

instruction.

**Tiered Instruction Page 6**

Within the RTI structure are several tiers, or levels, of instruction.

General education is referred to as Tier 1. Additional tiers, usually

two or three, use increasingly intense levels of instruction (for

example, smaller groups, more time, more progress monitoring).

**High-Quality, Research-Based Instruction and Interventions Page 10**

All school staff members use instructional methods and materials

that have been proven to work effectively.

**Collaboration Among School Staff Members Page 12**

School staff members (including the principal, general education

teachers, special education teachers, reading specialists, and school

psychologists) work together to help each child be successful.

**Fidelity of Implementation Page 14**

School staff members make sure that instructional materials and

methods are used exactly as intended.

**Important Information for Parents Page 15**

**Questions and Answers Page 16**

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**SCHOOL - WIDE SCREENING**

To fi nd out whether a child needs extra help, schools use “universal”

or “school-wide” screening. Some schools look at the results of yearly

national, state, or district tests. Other schools give all the children in all

of the grades screening tests early in the year and again in the middle

and at the end of the school year. Some schools do both. It is not unusual

for schools to fi nd that one out of every fi ve children could benefi t from

some sort of extra help. Schools are happy to know early in the year which

students need help so that teachers can begin helping them right away.

In 1997, Congress established a National Reading Panel. Th is group of 14

people studied the research about how children learn to read. Th ey learned

a number of things, including the following:

• Parents play a very important role in helping their child learn to read.

• It is very important for schools to fi nd out whether a young child may

have trouble learning to read.

• It is critical to provide help as early as possible to children who may

have trouble learning to read.

If the school or parents wait to provide the help that a child needs, the

child will get further and further behind in reading. When you have

concerns, it is important that you ask questions so that you and your

child’s school can work together to help your child.

Th ere are a number of ways to screen for and identify those children

who need extra help. For example, one type of screening test for students

in kindergarten and fi rst grade quickly measures how well a student

understands the sounds that letters make within a word. (Making the

sounds of letters in a word is called “decoding.”) Teachers have found

that students who have a good understanding of sounds and letters will

be more successful in learning to read than students who don’t have that

same understanding. Another type of screening test for students who

already know how to read asks students to read a paragraph or story.

Th e teacher checks to see how many correct words the student reads in

one minute. (Th e number of words read in one minute is called “the oral

reading fl uency rate.”) Scores on this type of test give teachers a good idea

of whether or not the child is having diffi culties in reading.

Teachers also check to see how well students understand what they read.

(Understanding what you read is called “reading comprehension.”) If

students have a good understanding of what they read, we say that they

have good reading comprehension.

**SCREENING – AN EXAMPLE:**

**A BRIEF VISIT TO FEYNMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

**EVALUATING ORAL READING FLUENCY RATES**

Morgan is in third grade. In mid-September, Morgan and her classmates

were given individual screening tests. Th e teacher listened to Morgan

read part of a story for one minute and then counted how many words

she read correctly during that time. Th e number of correct words read in

one minute is known as the oral reading fl uency rate. Morgan had an oral

reading fl uency rate of 87 correct words per minute. Th is is an average or

above average oral reading fl uency rate for a child at the beginning of third

grade and means that Morgan is probably not having trouble with reading.

Maren, also in third grade, had an oral reading fl uency rate of 48 correct

words per minute. Th is score of 48 lets the teacher know that Maren may

need some extra help with reading.

**QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT SCREENING**

• What tests does the school use to screen students for reading problems?

• How many times are the tests given during the year?

• Does the school use screening tests that measure decoding? fl uency?

reading comprehension?

• What other areas are measured?

• What are my child’s reading scores from the screening tests?

• Did any of the screening tests show that my child needs extra help?

What kind of help?

• How do my child’s scores compare with other children who are at the

same grade and age level?

\* **TIP** - You may want to keep a record of your child’s scores so that you

can compare them with scores on future tests.

**PROGRESS MONITORING**

If a child’s reading screening scores indicate lower than expected

achievement, he or she may need extra time with a teacher or skilled staff

member in addition to regular reading instruction. When a child receives

extra help, the teacher will want to fi nd out whether the extra instruction is

making a diff erence. To do this, the teacher will need to collect information

about the child’s reading by monitoring the child’s progress, often as

frequently as every week. Keeping close track of progress is called progress

monitoring. Teachers use the information gained through progress

monitoring to determine whether the instruction is, or is not, working and

to make decisions about instruction.

**PROGRESS MONITORING – AN EXAMPLE:**

**A BRIEF VISIT TO FEYNMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

**CHECKING DECODING SKILL PROGRESS**

Oliver, Maddie, Rose, and Wes are in kindergarten. Th e results of the fall

screening tests show that they are all having diffi culty with letter sounds.

Th ree times each week, their teacher provides additional instruction to

this small group using methods and materials that have been shown by

research to do a good job with helping students learn the sounds of letters.

Th e teacher wants to be sure that this extra instruction is helping these

students, so he spends several minutes at least once each week testing

each of them to see whether their understanding of the sounds of letters is

improving.

Th e teacher marks each child’s progress on a chart. After each brief test,

the teacher puts a mark on the chart to show how many letter sounds the

child can say in one minute. At the beginning of the year, Oliver could

say only six letter sounds in one minute, but after four weeks of extra

instruction, he could name 14, gaining an average of two letter sounds

per minute each week. Th is is considered good progress, and the teacher

believes that he is using the right kind of instruction for Oliver. Oliver’s

chart shows an increase each week in the number of letter sounds he

knows. Rose’s chart, however, shows that she has made very little progress

during the four weeks. She gained only two letter sounds per minute over

four weeks. Her teacher, along with other school staff members, decides

that another kind of instruction should be used. Both Oliver and Rose like

being able to look at the charts to see how they are doing. You can see their

charts on page 5





**QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT PROGRESS MONITORING**

• What does the school use to fi nd out whether my child is doing

better after receiving extra help? Charting? More testing? A computer

program?

• What is being measured?

• How often does my child’s teacher monitor my child’s progress?

• Does the school have a chart that shows the results of the progress

monitoring?

• Does the progress monitoring information show that my child is

making progress because of the extra instruction?

• If my child is not making progress, how long will the teacher wait before

moving my child to a diff erent tier or making a change in instruction?

\* **TIP** – You could ask for a copy of the progress monitoring information

on a regular basis so that you can follow your child’s progress.

**TIERED INSTRUCTION**

Instruction that occurs in tiers, or levels, is called tiered instruction.

Tiered instruction is usually organized into three or four tiers, although

some schools include more. Each tier is diff erent, with each level having

an increase in intensity, or an increased number of teacher-student

interactions.

**TIER 1**

Th e instruction that students receive in the general education classroom

with their regular classroom teacher is called Tier 1 instruction. All

children receive this fi rst level of reading instruction, which usually lasts

about 90 minutes each day. When a screening test shows that a child is at

risk for reading problems, the child may receive extra help in the general

education classroom with the general education teacher. If, after a brief

period of time, progress monitoring shows that there has been very little

progress, the teacher will consult with other staff members at the school.

Together, they might decide that the best way to help a child who has not

improved with the general education curriculum (Tier 1), even with extra

help, would be to give the child Tier 2 instruction.

**TIER 2**

Instruction in Tier 2 is in addition to that provided in Tier 1. Tier 2

instruction and interventions are provided with an increased level of

intensity. For example, Tier 2 instruction might be provided to a small

group of children for 30–40 minutes each day. Small-group instruction for

an additional period of time each day has many benefi ts for a child needing

extra help. With fewer children in a group, an individual child has more

opportunities to respond, and the teacher has more opportunities to give

immediate and appropriate feedback to that child. For example, if a child

reads a diffi cult word correctly, the teacher responds “Good. Th at’s right.”

If the child is having trouble, the teacher might say, “You are close; try that

again and be sure to look carefully at the fi rst letter in that word.” Th ink

of how many more times this type of exchange can happen with a group

of three or four students compared to a group of 25 or 26. Th e teacher is

more easily able to guide the child along the right course. An increase in

the amount of time a child receives small-group instruction also increases

the number of teacher and student interactions.

In some schools, the classroom teacher gives the small-group Tier 2

instruction in the general education classroom—perhaps in a quiet corner

of the classroom. In other schools, other school staff members, such as a reading specialist or librarian, provide Tier 2 instruction within the

classroom. Small-group instruction might also take place in another room

in the school—maybe in the school library or in an available offi ce.

Tier 2 instruction also includes careful monitoring and charting of the

progress each student is making. For example, each child may take a

brief test once a week with the teacher recording each score as a dot on

the chart. After several weeks, the teacher and student will be able to tell

whether a line connecting the dots that represent the test scores is going

up (indicating that progress is being made) or going straight or down

(indicating that little or no progress is being made). If the student succeeds

in Tier 2, this more intense instruction may no longer be necessary.

Th e classroom teacher, however, will need to pay close attention to the

student’s progress if Tier 2 instruction is discontinued to make sure that

the gains are maintained.

When a student is not successful in Tier 2 instruction, the teacher meets

with the parent and other school staff to decide what is best for the student

and to plan for the next steps. Sometimes, it is best for the student to

continue with Tier 2 instruction but with a diff erent type of intervention or

instruction. At other times, it is best to have the child receive increasingly

intense Tier 3 instruction with a reading specialist or special educator

working individually with the student for a longer period of time each day.

**TIER 3**

Th e intensity of services is again increased in Tier 3, because the teacher

typically is working with only one student at a time. Th is results in a

larger number of teacher-student interactions. Instruction can be tailored

specifi cally to the needs of that one student.

Progress is again monitored and charted frequently in Tier 3 to make

sure the student is doing well and to help the teacher decide whether he

or she needs to make changes in instruction. Th e teacher may learn from

the child’s progress charts that the child needs more instructional time,

for example, or needs to be taught using a diff erent method or diff erent

materials. Just as in Tier 2, school staff , the parents, and the student all

benefi t from having a chart of progress up to date and close at hand. When

the student is successful in Tier 3, school staff and the parents decide the

best way to maintain success: to continue the intense instruction or to have

the child receive instruction at a lower tier.

Information about a student’s instruction and progress during tiered

instruction also can be very helpful in determining whether the student

has a learning disability and thus would be more successful receiving

special education services, often considered to be the highest, and most

intense, tier in tiered instruction. (See “Important Information for Parents”

on page 15.)

**QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT TIERED INSTRUCTION AND TIER 1**

• How many tiers does my child’s school use?

• For how many minutes each day is my child participating in Tier 1

reading instruction?

• What are the guidelines from the local school district and the

State Department of Education regarding the amount of reading

instruction that a student should receive each day?

• What are my child’s specifi c strengths and weaknesses in reading?

• For how many minutes each day is my child receiving extra help in

Tier 1 reading instruction?

• What interventions is my child receiving?

• What methods and materials are being used?

• Who is the instructor?

**QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT TIER 2 INSTRUCTION**

• How is Tier 2 diff erent from Tier 1?

• Who determines that my child might benefi t from Tier 2 instruction?

• What are the reasons that the school might decide to move my child

to a higher or lower tier?

• What interventions are being used for my child in Tier 2?

• How many students are in my child’s group in Tier 2?

• Do the others in my child’s group have the same types of reading

problems that my child has?

• For how many days per week is Tier 2 instruction provided and for

how many minutes each day?

• What methods are used to monitor progress in Tier 2?

• How frequently is progress monitored in Tier 2?

• At what point do teachers consider a diff erent intervention within

Tier 2?

• Who is involved in that decision?

• How will you let me know when changes are made?

**QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT TIER 3 INSTRUCTION**

• How is Tier 3 diff erent from Tier 2?

• What factors determine that a student might benefi t from Tier 3

instruction?

• Who is involved in that decision?

• What interventions are being used for my child in Tier 3?

• For how many days per week is Tier 3 instruction provided and for

how many minutes each day?

• What methods are used to monitor progress in Tier 3?

• How frequently is progress monitored in Tier 3?

• At what point do teachers consider a diff erent intervention?

• How will you let me know when changes are made?

**HIGH-QUALITY, RESEARCH-BASED INSTRUCTION AND**

**INTERVENTIONS**

Schools that use RTI practices need to make sure that the materials and

instructional methods they use are of high quality and have been shown by

research to be eff ective (research-based). Th is means that the materials and

methods that the teachers are using are known to work well. Th ink about

when you follow directions for baking a cake or changing a tire. You want

to feel sure that the methods have been used before and that they worked!

In the same way, teachers must use teaching methods and materials that

have been successful.

Th e term “intervention” is used to mean a specifi c type of instruction

that is used to help with a specifi c type of problem. Th ere are many

high-quality, research-based instructional methods, programs, and

interventions. However, some lack this research support. Th erefore, an

important part of RTI is choosing the appropriate methods, programs, and

interventions for students who need extra help.

**QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTION**

• What reading materials and methods of instruction are used in my

child’s general education class?

• How does the school know that the reading program is research-based?

• Is my child receiving extra help (over and above the reading instruction

in general education)?

• Who is helping my child?

• Do the teachers and staff helping my child have special training in

reading?

**COLLABORATION AMONG SCHOOL STAFF MEMBERS**

One of the many positive results of RTI practices is that school staff

members experience an increased level of collaboration, or working

together. Th e principal, the general education teachers, the special

education teachers, the reading specialists, the school psychologists, and

others all feel a shared responsibility for helping each child succeed.

**QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT COLLABORATION AMONG SCHOOL STAFF**

**MEMBERS**

• Other than the general education teacher, who might be helping my

child?

• Do the diff erent teachers and other school staff members share

information with each other about how my child is doing? How often?

\* TIP – Let the school staff know that you will work with them by helping

your child at home and letting the school know your concerns.

**FIDELITY OF IMPLEMENTATION**

Fidelity of implementation is using instruction or materials in the way they

are supposed to be used. Educators design and develop good instructional

methods and materials and then test them long enough to be sure they

work well. When teachers in schools use these methods and materials, it is

important that they use them the right way. For example, developers have

designed left-handed scissors for left-handed children. Th e developers

know they work well – for left-handed children. What would happen if

a teacher gave a pair of these scissors to a right-handed child? Would

using these scissors be the easiest way for a right-handed child to learn to

cut? No. Is it likely that the child would be as successful as possible with

cutting? No. Th e same is true for other materials and methods used in the

classroom – they work best if used in exactly the way developers designed

them to be used.

Th is example also points out how important it is to have the materials be a

good “fi t” or match for the child.

**QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT FIDELITY OF IMPLEMENTATION**

• What process does the school have in place to ensure that instructional

materials and methods are being used as they are supposed to be used?

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR PARENTS**

All parents have a legal right to ask that the school evaluate their child to

determine whether he or she is eligible for special education services. If

you suspect that your child has a disability, you can write a letter of referral

to the school. All that you need to do is to write a very simple letter. Here

is an example:

Dear Principal (Principal’s Name),

Please evaluate my child (Your Child’s Name) for a possible learning

disability. Th ank you.

(Your Name)

When you give this letter to the school, school offi cials then are legally

required to respond to your request. In the response, school staff may want

to meet and explain the school’s procedures, goals, and timelines for the

individual evaluations. Th ey also will want to listen to your reasons for

requesting the evaluation.

You can request that the school conduct a special assessment at *any* time,

regardless of where your child is in the RTI process. Teachers also can refer

a child for special education assessment.